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TransporTAtion
Fall 1994
A Publication of the Regional Transportation Authority

PRT Develops with ADA at the Forefront

In May of 1994 the RTA continued in its commitment to serving people with disabilities by holding a public hearing to receive their input on the accessibility features of Personal Rapid Transit (PRT).

"PRT is one of the first transportation modes that is being developed with The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in mind from the design phase, and we are very excited to receive input from members of the community this early in the process," said RTA Executive Director Laura A. Jibben. "Feedback from the community was very positive and we look forward to continuing to receive their input throughout the PRT planning process," she added.

Testimony from the hearing was used when RTA staff traveled to Washington D.C. to request that the Federal Transportation Administration (FTA) grant an exemption from its regulations implementing ADA. The exemption, which was approved by the FTA recently, will permit one, instead of two wheelchair berths for each PRT vehicle. The request contends that the small size and weight thresholds of the PRT vehicle will preclude two berths. Furthermore the short headway of PRT vehicles will permit several wheelchair disabled persons to actually travel quickly

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Personal Rapid Transit

Carrying Transportation Into The 21st Century

Paving the way for full-scale testing of new transit technology, the Regional Transportation Authority entered into a contract agreement with Boston-based Raytheon Company to build a Personal Rapid Transit (PRT) prototype near the firm's headquarters in Lexington, Massachusetts. The prototype includes the development of a half-mile track and several testing vehicles. The contract agreement sets the stage for the beginning of Phase II of the PRT initiative at the RTA.

Under the agreement the RTA will provide $16-18 million for Phase II. Raytheon funds will make up the balance of the project, which is approximately $20 million. Raytheon plans to complete construction of the prototype within 36 months.

"We continue to believe that PRT technology will play an important role in shaping the future of the industry," said RTA Chairman, Thomas J. McCracken, Jr. "As we continue to struggle with emerging markets and the growing prevalence of non-traditional commuting patterns, PRT, in conjunction with existing modes of transit, should have a great deal to offer."

Program development for the project has been divided into three phases. Phase I of the program was a year-long system design feasibility study. The study was conducted by two engineering firms, Stone & Webster Engineering Corporation and Intamin AG. The two were unanimously chosen to conduct the study from over 12 proposals which were received from all over the world. Upon completion of Phase I, Stone & Webster's plan was taken over by Raytheon. It was then presented and approved by the RTA Board.

The purpose of Phase II is to prove that the design concept developed in Phase I is economically and technologically feasible. Raytheon is responsible for designing, developing and testing the prototype. Upon its completion they will then present the results to the RTA Board before the next phase of the project is considered.

PRT is an innovative transportation experiment created to address the growing problem of suburban traffic gridlock. The RTA has made significant headway with PRT since the agency agreed to develop this technology in 1990. As part of an integrated transportation system, PRT may help alleviate automobile congestion and pollution in growing suburban centers, whose needs are unmet by traditional modes of transit.

PRT would consist of small cars seating no more than five passengers each and wait-times would be

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From The Chairman

As the summer months begin to draw to a close and we begin to experience the change in seasons, the RTA is hard at work developing the 1995 budget for the agency and its three Service Boards, the CTA, Metra and Pace. This year, as in past years, the RTA is faced with the reality of preparing for tough economic times ahead, which are inevitably just over the horizon. Back in December, when I first took over the Chairmanship at the RTA I articulated three goals. One of these is to live within our means as a system. I anticipate that when I report back to you at the end of budget season we will have constructed a budget based on that principle.

The past few months have also allowed me to educate myself about the history and make-up of the agency as well as the concerns we face for the future. This summer, as I made my way around the region meeting with local officials, community groups and the media, I have learned a great deal about our constituency. Meetings with local officials in our six county area allowed me the opportunity to hear first hand what the issues are and how we might go about creating solutions. I appreciate the input that I have received thus far, and I look forward to continuing to provide a good working relationship with our customers.

This summer also saw the completion of the 1993 RTA Annual Report. The report focuses on the many changes the agency experienced in 1993 including, the continuation of capital and bonding programs to improve infrastructure throughout the region, and a new phase in the development of Personal Rapid Transit (PRT). The report, entitled "Charting The Course," communicates the reality of those changes, as well as my vision for the agency's future.

This issue of TranspoRTAtion will bring you up to date on the status of the PRT project, our new Strategic Plan, and a recent study on the future of public transit in the region. Because this publication is designed to keep you up to speed on RTA activities and accomplishments, I hope you will feel free to write to us with questions or concerns c/o: TranspoRTAtion, 181 W. Madison, Suite 1900, Chicago, IL 60602.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. McCracken, Jr.

McCracken Elected to Five-Year Term as RTA Chairman

In June, Regional Transportation Authority Chairman Thomas J. McCracken Jr. was unanimously elected to serve a 5-year term as RTA chairman.

McCracken was first appointed as chairman in December of 1993 to fulfill the remainder of former chairman Gayle Franzen's term. The chairman's new term runs from July 1, 1994 to June 30, 1999.

In thanking the Board, Chairman McCracken said, "I am deeply honored for the confidence that you have entrusted in me, and I look forward to continuing to ensure the financial stability and quality service that has made the RTA the finest transit property in the nation. I plan to lead the Authority into the next century by continuing to follow three guiding principles that I established for the agency when I first took the chairmanship. Those goals require that we redirect ourselves to creating a customer-driven system, live within our means, and fight unfunded federal mandates."

McCracken, formerly represented the 41st District as an Illinois state senator and prior to that he served as a state representative in the 81st District. ■

Regional Transportation Authority

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is published by the
Regional Transportation Authority
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Chicago, Illinois 60602
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Chairman: Thomas J. McCracken, Jr.
Executive Director: Laura A. Jibben
Editor: Jodi O'Toole

The Future of Public Transit

Metropolitan Planning Council Releases Report

The Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC) of Chicago recently released the final report of a year-long study by the Regional Public Transportation Project (RPTP) task force which recommended an expanded role for public transit, addressed regional mobility needs, and offered strategies to improve public transit in the northeastern Illinois region.

The task force presented their findings to the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) at its August Board meeting. Upon receiving the report, RTA Chairman Thomas J. McCracken, Jr. said, "This study affirms our vital role as transit planners in the region. This important group of informed transit stakeholders understand the vital role transit plays in the Northeastern Illinois region, and the impact the viability of a region's transit system has on the mobility of its citizens."

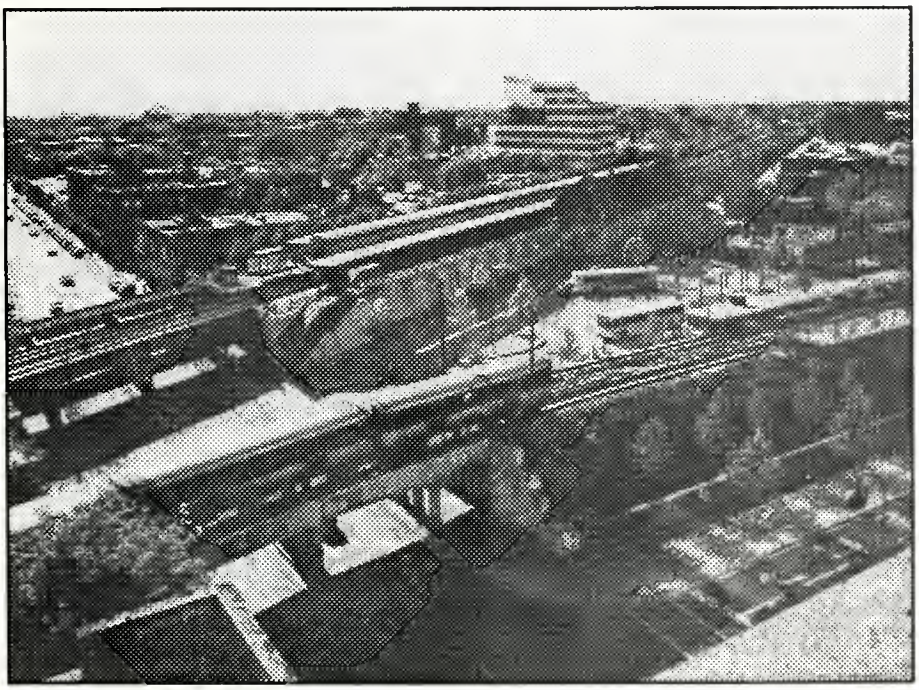
The basic finding of the RPTP task force is that the movement of people and jobs away from transit services, and a lack of funds to support the existing system, pose enormous challenges to transportation decision-makers. The study recommends a more regional approach to solving transit problems. To achieve this, the study suggests building on the strengths of the current system, while implementing new ways to study and fund new and innovative transit solutions.

The task force also recommended a series of short-term and long-term strategies for improving regional transportation — focusing on service, financing and public policy. Short-term strategies include: Improving existing services to increase usage of current public transit systems; Targeting regional growth areas in the suburbs for improved services; Expanding flexible services, such as park and rides and van pools, in emerging low-density markets; Streamlining service and boosting system productivity; Committing capital funds for infrastructure and equipment; Finding adequate and reliable funds for transit operations; Strengthening a regional commitment to travel alternatives to the auto; Coordinating planning and decision-making for all transportation modes; and Reworking transportation spending to encourage more efficient land development and transit innovation.

The task force also estimated the costs of increasing the region's investment in transit and provided a "menu" of potential new funding sources to be considered. The task force recommended strategies for reducing transit operating costs to remain competitive, and urged transit management and labor to work cooperatively to operate public transit as efficiently as possible.

The 27-member task force consisted of business, civic and community leaders from throughout the region. The $250,000 study took one year to complete and was funded in part by the RTA.

"The RTA Board of Directors is very grateful for the hard work and dedication of the task force," said RTA Chairman Thomas J. McCracken, Jr. "We believe this is an excellent beginning. As we continue to study the report we will use it to help guide the future of public transportation in the region." ■



The new Davis Street Station in Evanston serves as a hub for all modes of transit in the region.

RTA Develops Strategic Plan

Road Map Set for Public Transit

When RTA Chairman Thomas McCracken first took over the reins at the RTA he articulated three guiding goals designed around the Authority's mission; to ensure financially sound, comprehensive, coordinated public transportation for the northeastern Illinois region. Those three goals are to rededicate ourselves to creating a customer driven system, live within our financial means, and fight unfunded federal mandates.

"The goals I set for the agency are much more then just words on paper, I strongly believe that the first step in putting these policies into practice was in creating the first long-range strategic plan developed by the RTA since 1989," said McCracken.

The Strategic Plan was developed by Chairman McCracken and the RTA Board of Directors as a road map to help the RTA manage the many challenges that lie ahead. "Challenges that will reshape public transportation as we now know it well into the next century," said McCracken. Some of the changes relate to the evolving habits of commuters. Some concern advancements in commuting technology. Still others involve the painful reality of our nation's crumbling infrastructure.

The RTA serves as developers and implementers of mass transportation policy in the region. "The RTA has been entrusted with the responsibility of forming a clear understanding of our system's needs - both long and short term - and to explore thoughtful, creative ways to meet those needs.

"Because of the magnitude of this enormous undertaking the strategic plan was developed with a clearly defined sense of purpose, long-term strategic thinking, enlightened planning and savvy consensus building, in mind," said McCracken.

The Strategic Plan identifies the Authority's three main responsibilities as planning, funding, and oversight. The planning goal will ensure an integrated regional public transportation system through comprehensive planning and coordination with the Service Boards. The funding goal is defined as the RTA's ability to develop and allocate resources among the Service Boards to ensure they provide quality and cost-effective service. Finally, the oversight goal was developed as a means by which the RTA can monitor and evaluate Service Board performance to ensure that service is provided efficiently and effectively. Within the plan each responsibility is defined in a series of objectives and activities which will be undertaken to meet the overall goals. ■

Personal Rapid Transit

Continued from page 1

less than three minutes for a vehicle. Travel operations would be computer programmed and fully automated. The station stops would be off the main line to allow direct origin to destination travel, and guideways would be designed to project an aesthetically pleasing and unobtrusive impact on the environment.

In developing the PRT system, the RTA is meeting its statutory mandate included by the Illinois General Assembly in the 1983 RTA Act which reorganized the Authority. The Act states: "The Authority and the Service Boards shall study public transportation problems and developments (and) encourage experiments in developing new public transportation technology."

Ultimately, if the RTA Board decides to proceed, Phase III would be the actual deployment of a PRT demonstration system in Rosemont, Illinois. Rosemont was selected from 22 communities from the Northeastern Illinois region which originally expressed an interest in having a PRT system built. Rosemont won out as the most viable under the criteria of constructability, ridership and community support. ■

PRT / ADA at Forefront

Continued from page 1

to their destinations as in conventional transit with two wheelchairs per vehicle.

People with disabilities in the region, represented by the Transportation Task Force For People With Disabilities, supported the RTA's request for an exemption and voiced their support in a letter to the FTA this past July. PRT is currently being developed as a partnership between the RTA and Raytheon Company of Boston. The project is now in the design phase which will include the development of a PRT test-track. ■

Parker Receives Award for Commitment to People with Disabilities

As the nation was celebrating the fourth anniversary of the signing of the Americans With Disabilities Act, on July 26, 1994, RTA Director Kathleen K. Parker received an award from the Illinois Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) for her continued efforts on behalf of people with disabilities.

Parker received the award at an ADA rally at the James R. Thompson Center in Chicago. As a member of the RTA Board, Parker is the Chairman of the Mobility Limited Committee. In that role, she has made great strides in helping to meet ADA compliance for transportation in the region. In 1989 Parker was instrumental in developing the Regional Plan for Transportation for the Disabled, which committed the RTA to mainline accessibility. In 1993, with the help of the disabled community, the RTA implemented an aggressive campaign to determine the functional ADA eligibility of passengers for special services. Today, the RTA's certification program is being held up as a model for other transit agencies across the country.

In accepting her award, Parker said, "I congratulate each and every member of the disabled community who have worked so hard over the past four years to put the ADA into practice. Although we have a long road ahead, I believe that we can rest assured that the spirit of the 1990 legislation is alive and well in this region."

In carrying out its commitment to the 1989 Regional Plan, it is anticipated that by 1997, more than 70-

(Turn to back page)

RTA Pension Fund

RTA Reports Its Pension Fund Is One Of Healthiest In State

The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) Board of Directors recently reported that its employee pension fund is one of the most stable and secure in the state of Illinois.

"In the aftermath of recent controversy concerning other public pension funds, the RTA is extremely pleased to report that as a result of careful oversight, by the pension Board of Trustees, the RTA's employee pension plan continues to be funded in excess of its requirements," said RTA Chairman Thomas J. McCracken, Jr. "The actuarial soundness of the plan is apparent. As of June 30, 1994 its liabilities of $32.7 million are more than matched by its assets of $42.7 million."

The RTA Pension Plan is a non-contributory Defined Benefit Plan. It was adopted July 1, 1976 and covers employees of the RTA, Metra and Pace. The CTA manages a separate fund for its employees. The RTA plan is supervised by a board of seven trustees who are appointed by the RTA Board of Directors, four from private industry, and one representative each from the RTA, Metra and Pace. The Board of Trustees is responsible for selecting and monitoring the performance of the investment managers retained by the plan.

The Board of Trustees reported that the RTA plan is probably one of a very few public funds in the state of Illinois that is fully funded. In addition the RTA voluntarily complies with the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) standards. ERISA covers items such as, fiduciary requirements and funding standards. ERISA generally governs virtually all retirement plans, other than public plans.

Aside from the fact that the Board of Trustees oversees the plan, the Trustees cited the following safeguards as reasons for the plan's success.

- The plan has maintained Continental Illinois National Bank to hold all of the assets in a safekeeping trust account.
- An outside Pension Investment Management Reporting Service, Hewitt Associates, reviews investment managers and their investments on a monthly basis, and provides regular reports to the Trustees.
- The Trustees meet with each of the three investment managers twice a year at RTA headquarters to review their performance.
- A separate plan administrator coordinates all of the activities which are listed above.

"We are grateful for the hard work of the Board of Trustees, and we believe that the RTA plan should be used an example for other public agencies in the state," said McCracken. "We have set very high standards for our plan and we anticipate that other public agencies will adapt similar procedures and techniques as a result of our success." ■

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Director Demotte Serves on Railroad Safety Task Force

RTA Director David L. Demotte is currently serving on The DuPage County Railroad Crossing Safety Task Force. The task force which was assembled in April following a Railroad Crossing Safety Conference at which community members expressed their growing concerns about the issue of railroad safety.

"The goal of the task force is to develop an action plan to increase awareness on railroad crossing safety," said Director Demotte. "We're doing this because as we study all of the alternatives, it's crucial that we look to the community for input and suggestions," he added.

Some of the items under consideration include an increase in fines, from $50 to $500, and a three-month suspension of driving privileges for drivers who disobey the railroad right of way. Other ideas include the installation of four crossing gates instead of two, embarking on a countywide safety campaign, improving signage at rail crossings, providing better educational programs at local schools regarding proper railroad safety, eliminating some no whistle ordinances and eliminating street level crossings. The task force will study the feasibility of all proposed solutions. ■

Director Parker

Continued from page 5

percent of the buses in the region will be accessible and at least one car on every train will be accessible.

Parker has also carried her mission to the national level by serving as a member and former chairman of the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (Access Board) in Washington, D.C. The Access Board has been a leader in developing ADA accessibility guidelines, minimum accessibility guidelines for places of public accommodation, commercial facilities, state and local government facilities and transportation vehicles and facilities. The Access Board also offers training throughout the country on removing architectural transportation and communication barriers.

Director Parker has been a member of the RTA Board of Directors since 1983. She represents Suburban Cook County. ■

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